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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000434

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: POLLING DAY PROGRESSES PEACEFULLY

REF: A. 03 LILONGWE 1202

[B](#). LILONGWE 404

[C](#). LORD/SES-O EMAILS (5/20/04)

#### SUMMARY

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[1](#). (SBU) In a calm and orderly fashion, Malawians turned out to vote in Malawi's third democratic presidential and parliamentary elections on May 20. A morning rush to the polls led to an afternoon lull, with only a few reports of minor violence. Persistent problems with the voters' roll and voter transfers caused delays and resulted in some legitimately registered voters not being allowed to vote. Noting a generally good administration of the polls, observers have questioned internal controls at some voting centers. END SUMMARY.

#### SOME DELAYS AT OPENING

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[2](#). (U) There have been reports that some centers were delayed in opening at the scheduled 6:00 AM because officials were not ready on time. By 8:00 AM, it appears that polling stations were open and generally had all ballots and materials necessary for administering the vote.

#### FEW REPORTS OF MINOR VIOLENCE

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[3](#). (U) There have been a few reports of minor violence. In Blantyre, a police officer and elections official were reportedly beaten because a crowd of people waiting to vote thought the ballot box had been filled with ballots before the center opened. Electoral Commission investigations revealed that the ballots in the box were unused and all accounted for. Voting at the center began around 11:00 AM and will extend until 11:00 PM.

#### WEAK INTERNAL CONTROLS AND PROBLEMS WITH VOTERS' ROLL

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[4](#). (SBU) US Mission observers noted weak internal controls at some voting centers. They found that some ballot boxes had not been properly sealed and that not all control forms had been filled out, both of which were supposed to be completed during opening procedures. (NOTE: Without the properly completed documentation, it will be difficult to verify that voting boxes have not been tampered with.)

[5](#). (SBU) Observers also noted that many registered voters were not listed on the computerized voters' roll. Elections officials consulted the 1999 register to find the missing individuals, which created delays at many centers. When a voter was not found on either roll, the person was not allowed to vote. There has also been a great deal of confusion about processing voter transfers. These problems have frustrated and disenfranchised some legitimately registered voters.

[6](#). (SBU) In some centers, observers said, election officials did not mark on the voters' roll which voters had voted, nor did they indicate which voters were verified by use of the 1999 roll. This lack of record-keeping could result in discrepancies between the number of ballots cast and the actual number of voters.

[7](#). (SBU) Other minor administrative hiccups have occurred, mostly involving inadequate materials. The Malawi Electoral Commission has reportedly been replenishing centers suffering from shortages.

#### VOTER TURNOUT

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[8](#). (U) After a morning rush at the polls, voting centers were notably quieter in the afternoon. As of mid-afternoon, observers report that around 50% of registered voters have voted and that election officials are ready for a flurry of last minute voters. (NOTE: In the 1999 presidential elections, 92% of registered voters voted.)

#### COMMENT

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[9](#). (SBU) Apart from expected disorganization at some centers and the serious problems with the voters' roll, polling is proceeding relatively well. The failure of many elections officials to follow internal control procedures is of concern

as it could facilitate rigging.  
DOUGHERTY